

Chapter 543

"Just go away," he answered, turning his back on her, staring into the empty fireplace.

Silently, Cassia left the house as her wolf howled and tried to get her to
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"No, my wolf, we must leave him."

Each step was like dragging a dead weight behind her, a sheen of tears entering her eyes. The scent of Pietro de la Rios followed her, her wolf's mournful cries overwhelmed her, but she kept walking, kept putting one foot in front of the other, making her way back to the lab. Now was not the time. Maybe there would come a time, but it was something she couldn't explore right now. Sometimes the wolf had to wait, no matter how much it cried out...

"Mine!"

"Cass?" Dara's mental touch was an instant balm, the lone word sent with so much love that Cassia's wolf automatically responded and her agitation subsided a bit. She rolled her shoulders and stepped back from the microscope she'd been intent on for so long, cocking her head to the side as she was prone to do when Dara contacted her.

She could tell instantly that it was late, and she blinked in surprise to see she was alone in the lab. When had everyone gone? Pinching the bridge of her nose to try to stave off a headache, she had vague memories of people saying goodnight and waving a hand in acknowledgement. That felt like hours ago.

"Dad's threatening to come over and yank you out of the lab if you don't come home," her sister said, and she sighed loudly, conceding she needed to get home.

"I'm just leaving now, Dara." Cassia took the time to ensure any experiments running were secure, and all samples safely locked up before she unclipped the clasp at the nape of her neck and ran weary hands through her tangled curls.

The consequences of meeting Pietro had been so unexpected that burying herself in work had been the only thing she could do until she worked out how to proceed. Her wolf had no reticence about what they should be doing, however, the woman did. Was the vampire really her mate or was she just reacting to being around his scent so much? Did hybrids know their mates instantly as Weres did? Lily said yes but that didn't mean it worked the same for all of them. Did it?

As she headed out of the lab, she couldn't keep her eyes from wandering to the house he was in. The light was on in his bedroom window and her feet wanted to move in that direction but she forced herself to turn for home. Dara wasn't kidding about their father, he would come looking for her if she didn't show up soon. As Dads went, theirs was pretty reasonable compared to most of the other hybrids, however, he was still prone to the usual over-protectiveness shared by all the alpha males of the pack. It was best to heed him when he did start making noises of displeasure.

Crossing the compound quickly, Cassia let herself into the house she shared with her parents and sister. She was surprised her parents weren't waiting up when she got in. Instead, the house was quiet so she headed into the kitchen to grab something to eat.

Their kitchen had a homely feel to it, with cedar wood cabinets, complete with a standalone dresser on the wall as they entered the room. The long breakfast bar created a feel of being enclosed within the main cooking area, extending out from the wall for a few feet before tapering in at a forty-five degree angle. It took up most of the length of the room and had six wrought-iron chairs with plush cushioned seats on the outside edge so people could sit and chat with whoever was cooking.

Cassia loved the kitchen and her mother's tales of how her father had cursed the entire time he'd helped their grandfather build it. No one had been allowed in the house when it was being built and Alexei had threatened everyone with pain of death if they mentioned he'd helped. Just imagining their father with a hammer and nails had been enough to make her and Dara laugh until tears ran down their faces.

With a smile playing on her lips, Cassia opened the refrigerator and took out a plate of chicken, biting into a piece before placing it on the bar. It was 1am by the kitchen clock and not an ideal time to be eating but thankfully, her metabolism was so good that eating this late wouldn't be an issue. She began making a pot of tea, hearing her sister coming downstairs.

"Pour me one too, please."

She was already getting a second cup from the overhead cupboard as Dara walked in. Her sister padded in with bare feet and wearing a dark blue nightshirt. She was clearly ready for bed though she appeared wide awake as if she had something on her mind. That made two of them!

Cassia wasn't so lost in her own issues that she wasn't aware something had happened that had startled her sister. As Dara hopped up onto a chair, she poured out the tea and walked around to join her. "So, we haven't had any chance to talk with all the stuff going on. What's on your mind?"

Dara frowned and unknowingly imitated her sister's earlier headache appeasing pinch of the nose. She had known Cassia wouldn't forget about catching up, the only thing was, she didn't know if she could break Kothi's confidence. She told her sister everything but what had happened that day with their friend was highly personal and he shared little with anyone as it was. It seemed wrong to talk about it.

"Come on, Dara, it's been bugging you whatever it is. Will it help if I promise not to say anything?"

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She met her sister's gaze and knew she would keep any confidence given unless it was detrimental to the pack. The question was, did Kothari's loss of control constitute a detriment to the pack? It was hard to make the right judgement call when her emotions were so conflicted. Maybe she should tell Cassia and let her make the decision, or was that the coward's way out?

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Sighing deeply, Dara sipped at her tea and reached for a piece of chicken. "The other day I came across Kothari in the forest, down by the lake. He was more intense than usual, Cass. We talked a little and then he was suddenly furious for no apparent reason." Dara bit into the chicken, staring down into her cup as she chewed thoughtfully.

"Did he hurt you, Dara?" Cassia quiet question had her head shooting back up and they stared at each other for a long moment before she could speak.

"Sort of," she admitted sensing her sister's automatic tensing as she uttered the words. "He didn't mean to, Cass, I know he didn't." She rushed on before her sister could say anything further. "It was as if he lost control for a moment and his vampiric side took over. He was bleeding, large cuts forming on his chest as if they were self-inflicted in some way though he didn't cut himself physically. I shifted to wolf form and tried to balance him that way. It triggered his panther and he shifted too."(w)ww.nóV~e!w~OŘM.(c)~@~@

She met her sister's gaze again, confusion in her eyes. "Cass, he was so surprised to see his animal. It was almost as if he hadn't seen that part of himself for such a long time."

Dara's words frightened Cassia, as did the plea in her voice. She knew she wanted her to keep this secret but if what her sister said was true – then Kothi was in serious trouble and needed some kind of intervention. How could she not say something to their parents and Alphas? "Dara..."